

Manchester GACIT Meeting - Dec 13, 2017

December 13, 2017 GACIT Hearing in Manchester, NH

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NHDOT:

Chris Waszczuk, Deputy Commissioner NHDOT. Chris Waszczuk introduced other NHDOT staff in attendance. He explained that Turnpike dollars can only be used on projects on the Turnpike System. He then presented details of the Turnpike System, and the benefits of the proposed toll increase.

Public:

Mayor Ted Gatsas of Manchester speaking as a resident of Manchester. He commented that when he was in the NH Senate back in 2009, the Senate discussed the selling of a portion of roadway in Portsmouth (High Level Bridge on I-95) to the turnpike system for, \$120 million. At that time the Legislature was informed the \$120 million would last 20 years, however those funds disappeared in a 5 year period. He suggested that NHDOT look at the proposed toll rate, it really isn't a 27% increase, it is a 54 % increase (commuting two-ways), and this is misleading. He noted that back in 2000 the I-93 widening was to cost \$145 million (9 years to complete) and it is still not completed and the cost is \$495 million. We really shouldn't call it a Ten Year Plan, it takes much longer. Why don't we have a five year plan and focus on what can be done. He asked if NHDOT was going to be responsible for the upkeep, and maintenance to remove the graffiti on the proposed sound walls. He stated it is irresponsible to talk about an increase in the tolls. He stated that Exit 6 needs relief now. The City suggested a couple options but NHDOT did not get back to them. He is **opposed to the toll increase**.

Lou Delasandro, NH Senator. He expressed his appreciation to NHDOT. He has served in the NH Senate 20+ years and has lived in Manchester for 50+ years. He noted that many people visit NH because we have good roads, and they are willing to pay to keep good roads. He supports the increase in the tolls as it is vital to the economy and safety. He noted that both Exits 6 & 7 have been talked about for a long time and there are accidents every day. Exit 6 needs to be fixed. The bridges are falling apart, he suggested that people look up and see their condition, they need to be fixed. The Turnpike System has an AAA bond rating, it is well managed, we have a quality turnpike system and we should be proud of what we are doing. Good roads are good for the people of Manchester and the State. He stated three key reasons to support the toll increase, the economy, safety, and timeliness. He applauds GACIT for conducting the public hearings. He noted that with the TIFTA money, roads were paved and improvements made. The roads belong to all of us, he **supports the toll increase**.

Andy Sanborn, NH Senator. He asked how NHDOT could pull \$36 million out of the pockets of the people of NH at Christmas time. He commented that even though there were 23-26 meetings, he is still frustrated for several reasons. The proposal to raise the tolls was presented in the late of night as it was brought forth on Wednesday, Nov 22 the day before the holiday. In Washington D. C. there are

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Gregory Gorman, Pike Industries Belmont. Supports the toll increase, we need safer roads, and congestion causes inefficiencies. He noted that vehicles are constantly stopped on the highway (Exit 6). Supporting the increase as it is a return on our investment. We have the one of the lower toll rates in the country. **(Supports the toll increase)**

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Harold (Hal) Lynde, Pelham Selectman but speaking for himself. He noted that NHDOT is barely hanging on, as gas tax revenues have decreased with fuel efficient vehicles. What is proposed is really a 20 year plan. He asked people to consider what are the real cost of sitting in traffic. He supports funding for NHDOT as it will save money and lives. **(Supports the toll increase)**

Matthew Pitaro, Resident of Allenstown. He explained that he works in Hudson and has never had an accident at Exits 6 or 7. He supports the removal of the Merrimack tolls. His is concerned about the

feasibility studies and the advancing projects. He has some concerns about the toll pricing, and he is opposed to the toll increase. He commented about comparing NH tolls rated to the rest of the country, why don't we tote this as a NH advantage. He stated that the projected revenues under the new toll rates don't add up, and he suggested that we be careful with the approach we use. **(Opposed to the toll increase)**

Elizabeth Ropp, resident of Manchester. She supports the toll increase, because we are way below the national toll rates. She is in the field of preventative/alternative medicine. We need preventive transportation health to maintain the infrastructure, reduce accidents, and reduce stress. She appreciates the work of NHDOT and **supports the toll increase.**

Keith Carlsen, resident of Marlboro Road. He questions the timing of the discussion on the toll increase. Many people on-line are opposed to the increase. He is concerned about the impacts on working families, it may need that people don't buy Christmas gifts, or will have to use their credit cards. Commercial enterprises will pass along the increase to their customers. Suggest that the discussion be delayed a couple years, or do a slow increase. Concerned about people who don't have an EZ pass as the increase could be \$500 right up front. **(Opposes the toll increase)**

Jim O'Connell resident of Manchester. He is very much in favor of the toll increase. He has also been on-line and the facts about the need and benefits of the toll increase are compelling. He commented that the people who spoke this evening against the toll increase didn't address the real needs. He believes this is modest proposal and it is easy low-hanging fruit. It will allow projects to advance, improve safety issue and easy of travel. He travels frequently to others State, New York and the toll rates are more. He strongly **supports the toll increase.**

Ed Naile, Coalition of NH Taxpayers Concord. He commented that many people he works with look to see where they can buy the cheapest gas. Highway construction projects don't always fix the real issues, look at Route 202 there is a straight away area and there are still accidents. Not everyone has a computer to find out about the meeting. This discuss belongs with the Legislature. He is **(opposed to the toll increase).**

Peter Ramsey, NH Travel Council Manchester. Couldn't stay for the meeting, but included a comment on the sign-in care- Toll increases are critical to the state infrastructure and future. **(Supports the toll increase)**

Adjournment:

Meeting adjourned at 9:41 p.m.

Supports	16
Opposed	11
Comments Only	4

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Gregory Gorman, Pike Industries Belmont. Supports the toll increase, we need safer roads, and congestion causes inefficiencies. He noted that vehicles are constantly stopped on the highway (Exit 6). Supporting the increase as it is a return on our investment. We have the one of the lower toll rates in the country. **(Supports the toll increase)**

Glenn J. Ouellett, Manchester. He commented that the Hooksett toll has more traffic than the rest of the State. We have been waiting for improvements at Exit 6 since 2004, this is a dangerous area. If the projects are delayed or extended this will cost more money. We need to make the investment today. He is not in favor or against, but stated that the NHDOT need to do a better job and get the job done. He commented that Manchester Fire Department responds to accidents which impacts city resources. **(Comments only)**

John Spottiswood, Resident of Pelham. He noted that he is trying to put four kids through college. We need to find a better way for taxpayers. He doesn't want another tax. **(Opposes the toll increase)**

Harold (Hal) Lynde, Pelham Selectman but speaking for himself. He noted that NHDOT is barely hanging on, as gas tax revenues have decreased with fuel efficient vehicles. What is proposed is really a 20 year plan. He asked people to consider what are the real cost of sitting in traffic. He supports funding for NHDOT as it will save money and lives. **(Supports the toll increase)**

Matthew Pitaro, Resident of Allenstown. He explained that he works in Hudson and has never had an accident at Exits 6 or 7. He supports the removal of the Merrimack tolls. His is concerned about the

feasibility studies and the advancing projects. He has some concerns about the toll pricing, and he is opposed to the toll increase. He commented about comparing NH tolls rated to the rest of the country, why don't we tote this as a NH advantage. He stated that the projected revenues under the new toll rates don't add up, and he suggested that we be careful with the approach we use. **(Opposed to the toll increase)**

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Jon Hopwood, resident of Manchester. He noted that he is a veteran with PTSD. His comments regarding Exit 6 is dangerous, and for someone with PTSD it is challenging to navigate the area. He added that in NH it takes years/decades to construct roads which is unacceptable. He noted that it really is a matter of will and how much we want to accomplish. The proposed increase is nothing; look at what they charge to cross the George Washington Bridge, which is reasonable. He supports the comments made by Lou Delasandro, NH Senator and Daniel O'Neil, Manchester. **(Supports the toll increase)**

Juanita Dangle, resident of Merrimack. She agrees with the comments made by the Mayor and Andy Sanborn. She is on a fixed income and travels regularly to see her daughter in Concord. This is an unfair tax. **(Opposes the Toll Increase)**

Ken Rhodes, Resident of Auburn. He noted that he testified at the October 22 public hearing in Manchester. He supports the toll increase. , He noted that current gas prices are \$1.50 less than when the gas tax was increased in 2014 by 4.2 cents. We can absorb the increased toll cost, as it is so minor to other household related costs. Opportunities exist right now; we need to leave a legacy for our children. He strongly **supports the toll increase**.

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uses toll credits as our match to the federal dollars. This further reduces the funds available for transportation improvements.

Luke Mroz, resident of Salem. He is opposed to the toll increase and echoes previous comments made in opposition to the toll increase. It will affect people on fixed income; businesses will pass the cost on to consumers, and it affects our overall quality of life. There was a toll increase in 2007, and it has impacted people's quality of life. **(Opposes the toll increase)**

Julie Chizmas, City of Nashua. The City of Nashua supports accelerating projects, as the I-93 corridor is a vital economic corridor for the Region and State, referring to Fidelity, BAE Systems, the retail outlets in Merrimack, and the tourist coming to the State. She referred to planning studies which had been completed and have documented the need for the Turnpike widening projects, and traffic volume forecasts documented in those studies. She explained that in 2016, traffic volumes exceeded the forecast for (Exit 8 and Exit 10). She noted that there are reoccurring delays under normal conditions, and cited crash data indicating numerous fatalities and serious injuries. Delaying projects would cost time and money, beside the loss due to fatalities and injuries. **(Comments only)**

Stan Bodner, Fire Service and Rescue Pembroke. Commented that NHDOT does a beautiful job on the highways. Need more signage to report unlawful activities and fines. He mentioned, leaving children in cars, cell phone use, and people engaging in other activities while in vehicles which detracts them and causes incidents. **(Comments Only)**

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Adjournment:

Meeting adjourned at 9:41 p.m.

Supports	16
Opposed	11
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Manchester GACIT Meeting - Dec 13, 2017

December 13, 2017 GACIT Hearing in Manchester, NH

Executive Councilor Pappas welcomed all in attendance. Councilor Pappas explained the purpose of the public hearing to gather public input for the proposed Turnpike toll increase for acceleration and expansion of the Turnpike capital program. Councilor Volinsky commented that it has been a good process recognizing the diversity of opinions and asked all to be respectful.

NHDOT:

Chris Waszczuk, Deputy Commissioner NHDOT. Chris Waszczuk introduced other NHDOT staff in attendance. He explained that Turnpike dollars can only be used on projects on the Turnpike System. He then presented details of the Turnpike System, and the benefits of the proposed toll increase.

Public:

Mayor Ted Gatsas of Manchester speaking as a resident of Manchester. He commented that when he was in the NH Senate back in 2009, the Senate discussed the selling of a portion of roadway in Portsmouth (High Level Bridge on I-95) to the turnpike system for, \$120 million. At that time the Legislature was informed the \$120 million would last 20 years, however those funds disappeared in a 5 year period. He suggested that NHDOT look at the proposed toll rate, it really isn't a 27% increase, it is a 54 % increase (commuting two-ways), and this is misleading. He noted that back in 2000 the I-93 widening was to cost \$145 million (9 years to complete) and it is still not completed and the cost is \$495 million. We really shouldn't call it a Ten Year Plan, it takes much longer. Why don't we have a five year plan and focus on what can be done. He asked if NHDOT was going to be responsible for the upkeep, and maintenance to remove the graffiti on the proposed sound walls. He stated it is irresponsible to talk about an increase in the tolls. He stated that Exit 6 needs relief now. The City suggested a couple options but NHDOT did not get back to them. He is **opposed to the toll increase**.

Lou Delasandro, NH Senator. He expressed his appreciation to NHDOT. He has served in the NH Senate 20+ years and has lived in Manchester for 50+ years. He noted that many people visit NH because we have good roads, and they are willing to pay to keep good roads. He supports the increase in the tolls as it is vital to the economy and safety. He noted that both Exits 6 & 7 have been talked about for a long time and there are accidents every day. Exit 6 needs to be fixed. The bridges are falling apart, he suggested that people look up and see their condition, they need to be fixed. The Turnpike System has an AAA bond rating, it is well managed, we have a quality turnpike system and we should be proud of what we are doing. Good roads are good for the people of Manchester and the State. He stated three key reasons to support the toll increase, the economy, safety, and timeliness. He applauds GACIT for conducting the public hearings. He noted that with the TIFTA money, roads were paved and improvements made. The roads belong to all of us, he **supports the toll increase**.

Andy Sanborn, NH Senator. He asked how NHDOT could pull \$36 million out of the pockets of the people of NH at Christmas time. He commented that even though there were 23-26 meetings, he is still frustrated for several reasons. The proposal to raise the tolls was presented in the late of night as it was brought forth on Wednesday, Nov 22 the day before the holiday. In Washington D. C. there are

discussions about a \$1 trillion dollar plan, we should encapsulates all the revenue sources we have. He noted that 68% percent of the toll revenue will come from Merrimack and the Hooksett tolls. The NH Legislature has done a good job funding the transportation system referencing the TIFIA and GARVEE bonds. He noted he heard about this meeting about one hour ago, and sent out an email to his constituents in the time before the meeting he received about 50 responses from various people including disabled veterans, business owners, campground owners and others, and he is yet to hear that this is a good idea. He felt it important to be at this meeting. He noted that there was a 23% rise in the gas tax, and 3 years later we are asking for more money. The highway fund is fully funded. Decisions like this are best made in the Legislature. Everyone wants roads and bridges safe, red list bridges have been decreasing in number. He also discussed the change to the federal definition of red list bridges, referencing how this changed the status of a bridge in New Boston. He suggested we pause and see what happens in Washington D. C The Legislature makes the final decisions on the Ten Year Plan; we are putting the cart-before-the horse. He noted that members of the NH Senate believe this is being rushed to quickly, there are financial and legislative issues that need to be addressed. **(Opposes the toll increase)**

Councilor Volinsky commented that the meeting notes of the three public hearings on the proposed toll increase will be posted on the NHDOT website by Friday.

Daniel O'Neil, Alderman City of Manchester. He commented that he supports the toll increase for several reasons. It will improve congestion, congestion impacts tourism, and tourism is important to the State. He cited the \$1.2 billion dollar improvements near the airport, and the need for improvements at Exits 6 & 7. Safety is a real issue. Exit 6 has the highest accident rate in NH. This is a large resource commitment for police, fire and other emergency responders. Another reason for supporting the toll increase is – jobs, jobs, jobs. He noted that there is no better sign of a good economy than construction equipment. **(Supports the toll increase)**

Doug Thomas, NH State Representative, Londonderry. He commented that it was a good presentation, and there are good intentions, but increasing the tolls is not on the “road to good intentions”. He does not support the toll increase, and stated his reasons why the toll increase is not appropriate. There should be no more tax increases, this especially affects people on fixed incomes. The economy is growing, and low income people will be hurt with the increased toll rates. We are sending the wrong message, especially since the economy is just beginning to grow. The toll increase is not a NH friendly way or a good message to tourist. We need to look at other ways and other programs, this is so important. He is opposed to the toll increase. **(Opposes the toll increase)**

Keith Hirschmann, Alderman City of Manchester. He noted that his comments are in the context of safety issues. He represents about 12,000 residents of Manchester. He noted a completed study of the Amoskeag (Exit 6) completed in 2012. Exit 6 is very dangerous, there are many accidents (549), and in the last three years the accident rate has increased by- 35%. At times there are police details directing traffic at NH Community College. Accelerated funding is needed for this project; people are stopped on the off ramp and lined up on the highway. He suggested that improvements start at Exit 7 to relieve

some of the issues at Exit 6. There has been substantial development in the area since the 1970's (Campbell development), and further development is anticipated in the Hackett Hill area. He asked that Exits 6 & 7 be accelerated. **(Supports Toll Increase)**

John T. O'Connor, NH State Representative, Derry. He commented that during the other GACIT meetings there wasn't any discussion about a potential toll increase. He is a member of the Southern NH Planning Commissions, and they haven't had time to discuss, react or consider a recommendation. The process is moving too fast especially for this time of year. He suggested we hold off on a vote, and let the legislative process work. **(Opposes toll increase)**

Mike Shelton, President Manchester Chamber of Commerce. The Chamber is a business advocacy organization who includes 800 + business. They support the proposal for the toll increase and the improvements. He commented that roads and bridges are the backbone of the economy, important to the movement of materials and finished projects from the manufacturing industry. They are important to tourism. Deficiencies in the infrastructure are a safety concern and impact our ability to grow the economy. New Hampshire has not fully supported infrastructure as it needs too. This is also why the Chamber supported the increase in the gas tax a few years ago, and this is why they are supporting the toll increase now. There are too many red list bridges. Need safety improvements. The delays on I-93 are too long. We need to plan for the future and for the feasibility of future projects. Infrastructure projects take years to design and build. He does not believe that the proposed toll will impact tourism, as the toll increase is a miniscule amount to the tourist traveler, especially when compared to other toll rates around the county. Suggest consideration of some local incentives for NH residents. He echoed support for all the previous comments regarding the need for improvements at both Exits 6 & 7, safety, economic development, and grows the economy. Accident rates will continue to increase if improvements aren't made. This is an investment. This is a user fee. **(Supports Toll Increase)**

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