

December 4, 2017 GACIT Hearing in Portsmouth, NH

Executive Councilor Volinsky welcomed all in attendance. He explained that Councilor Prescott was unable to attend the meeting. Councilor Volinsky asked anyone wanting to speak to complete the sign-in card or submit written comment to the NHDOT by December 11, 2017. Councilor Volinsky provided a brief overview of the meeting, which is to have a common factual understanding of the Turnpike System and to discuss the proposal prepared by NHDOT at the request of GACIT members regarding the toll system and how the proposed increase in tolls could address the various concerns heard at the public hearings. He explained that GACIT held 23 public hearings in all five Executive Councilor Districts during September and October.

NHDOT:

Chris Waszczuk, Deputy Commissioner NHDOT. Chris Waszczuk introduced Commissioner Victoria Sheehan, and Assistant Commissioner Bill Cass. He noted that other NHDOT staff were in attendance. He explained that Turnpike dollars can only be used on projects on the Turnpike System. He explained that some common themes were heard at the 23 public hearings including the request to advance projects in the Turnpike schedule, and how the Bow-Concord project is a significant investment which constrains the advancement of other projects and infrastructure improvements. Thusly, the proposal prepared by NHDOT is to expand the turnpike system to include the limits of the Bow-Concord project, which would free up federal funds for infrastructure improvements throughout the state. He then presented details of the Turnpike System, and the benefits of the proposed toll increase.

Councilor Volinsky. Infrastructure improvements are a shared responsibility. Setting the toll rate is the responsibility of the Governor and Council (G & C) and implementing the improvements is the responsibility of the DOT. He asked those who were going to speak, to comment on how they are doing as a business relative to the Business Profit Tax (BPT) rate cuts and to note if they are in support or don't support the toll increase presented for consideration.

Public:

Chuck Morse, President NH State Senate. He thanked GACIT and NHDOT for holding the public hearing tonight. He also expressed his concerns for the health of Councilor Prescott. He stated that he has respect for the process and that there were twenty-three (23) public hearings, but the plan for the toll increase has not been debated, and it came out Wednesday, November 22, the day before the Thanksgiving holiday. He doesn't support taxing the people of New Hampshire. The plan submitted doesn't convey that NH is open for business or reflects the continued efforts of the NH Legislature to promote and encourage business development. He made references to changes to the BPT rate, support of the low interest TIFIA loan, the gas tax increase of 4.2 cents, and improvements at rest areas to support charging of electric cars which support growing jobs in NH, and addressing various issues regarding the roadways in NH. He noted the legislature is working on a motor vehicle fee that includes use of electric cars. He believes the process is working and that the needs of the communities are being addressed. He noted that back in 1998, and then Commissioner Kenison said that the issues of fixing red list bridges will continue to grow. He noted that goods are coming into NH. The current legislative

process is working. He doesn't support a toll increase or gas tax increase or a tax on working families. He expressed thanks for the opportunity to speak and noted that the Legislature will continue to be involved. **Opposed to the toll increase.**

Regina Birdsell, NH State Senate and Chair of the Transportation Committee. She thanked GACIT and NHDOT for holding the public hearing tonight. She noted that she has talked to the Chair of the NH House of Representatives and there is concern that the process to increase the toll has lacked transparency. She noted that the public outreach process began with the Regional Planning Commission (RPCs) and continues through the GACIT hearing process which provides input to amend the plan. She noted that she attended the GACIT meeting in Kingston and the increase of raising the tolls was not discussed at that time, nor was there an outcry regarding the tolls. Her biggest concern is with the process, as the plan was unveiled the day before Thanksgiving. She is not sure that all of her constituents know about what is being proposed, and there is a need for more public input. She asked what would happen if the Legislature doesn't approve the turnpike projects in the Ten Year Plan (TYP) and the Council approved the toll increase. She continued to say then the Turnpike System which is already flush with money and would then have additional money. There is a need to slow the process down. **Opposed to the toll increase.**

Kevin Avard, NH Senate District 12 Nashua, also serves as Chair of Energy and Natural Resources and Vice-Chair of Health and Human Services. He commented about a single- working mother who has to pay two tolls to get to work, and how even how a little increase in the tolls really matters to some people. He also commented that employees at Ross Express, a local trucking company, participate in a profit sharing program. The toll increase would affect their profits and these employees count on this money. Ross Express currently pays \$13,000 a month in tolls. This toll could affect people living on the fringe. **Opposed to the toll increase.**

Andy Sanborn, NH Senate. He wished Councilor Prescott well. He noted that all of the other Executive Councilors should be at this public hearing. He commented that government has two roles- safety and good roads and infrastructure. He is concerned about the process, as the plan was done in the "cover of darkness" the day before Thanksgiving. He commented that additional public hearings are needed and there should be one in each district. He commented he has a number of concerns regarding this proposal including: there is really no financial benefit to the proposed toll rate regarding the 40 trip tolls discount; this will hit the middle and lower class the most. The toll increase is essentially a penalty to go to work as an example the fee could double from \$760 to \$1,500 yearly; President Trump said that there were going to be a focus on infrastructure improvements and there could be a financial windfall coming from Washington, D.C. The NH Legislature and Governor have been doing a great job and they have not been included in this process to date. The federal government has changed the definition of red list bridges (referring to a bridge in New Boston). He does not support the toll increase. He noted the need to slow the process down. **Opposed to the toll increase.**

Laura Pantelakos, NH Representative and former Portsmouth City Councilor, Ward 1. She commented that I-95 has been widened four times and noise is an issue. It is not fair to the residents who have put

up with the noise for years. Noise barriers are crucial. Some residents can't use their property due to the noise. She noted that there is also a gas relay station near the Turnpike which is also a concern. She noted that as a "Spending Democrat" her concern is that revenues sources haven't changed over time. She **supports the toll increase** if the funding can be used for the noise barrier in Portsmouth.

Eric Eby, City of Portsmouth Engineer. He noted he is speaking on behalf of the City Manager, he then read a letter into the record. **The City is in favor of the proposed toll increase** provided funding is included for the Type II sound barriers in Portsmouth.

Christopher Parker, Dover Assistant City Manager. He attended the September 28th GACIT meeting in Dover. He commented that improvements cost money and we need to address the subject of revenue. He supports the Type II sound wall improvements and **supports the toll increase**.

Julie Chizmas, City of Nashua Transportation Planner. The City of Nashua supports accelerating projects on the Turnpike system, as this 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. **Provided comments only.**

Greg Moore, Americans for Prosperity NH. This organization includes 44,000 activists. The NH Legislature is working hard to make NH more attractive. The organization wants less use of tolls. There are 106,000 NH residents working out of State, we need to keep them here. Even a \$1.00 increase is an imposition for some people. He noted that in Hampton people will use Route 1 instead of paying a toll because of the imposition. He commented that young people are driving older cars and some contractors are driving older vehicles as they can't afford more. The process is disappointing. The Legislature knew nothing about this plan. The timing is bad. Slow down the process or scrap the process. **He is opposed to the toll increase.**

Kyle Fox, Town of Merrimack. He noted the Town supports the toll increase proposal because of the elimination of the two ramp tolls in Merrimack (at Exit 10 & Exit 11). Congestion on the turnpike continues to increase, small accidents result in major traffic backup, and this affects emergency response time and impacts local residents. Congestion is an economic development issue, and companies transporting goods are wasting time sitting in traffic. The proposal also includes Bow-Concord project being added to the Turnpike system would free up other funding to be used other places around the State, such as Route 101 A and the Circumferential Highway. **The Town supports the toll increase.**

Gary Abbott, Associated General Contractors of NH. He noted he has been involved in the process for about 30 years. He trusts the NHDOT and they do a great job with the limited funds available. The

bottleneck in Bow-Concord area is an issue, similar to Nashua and I-95. These projects take time to complete. The GACIT process works. The plan presented is a realistic plan that works; he complimented the NHDOT on the Ten Year Plan. He noted he attended several GACIT meetings which include the Regional Planning Commissions (RPCs), which commented they need more projects to be included in the Ten Year Plan to meet the needs, but there is limited funding. The proposed toll increase is a user fee, not a tax. **He supports the toll increase.**

Bill Perez, Pinard Waste Systems of Hooksett. They have about sixty (60) commercial vehicles. The tolls are a huge expense for the company, during the year they spend about \$30,000 and with the proposed increase it would be about \$50,000 a year. The truck industry always takes the hit. Commuters use the tolls to get to work; the proposed increase is an issue as not everyone is upper or middle class. Suggest slowing the process down. **Opposed to the toll increase.**

Rebecca McBeath, NH House of Representative Portsmouth Ward 2. She thanked all who prepared the Ten Year Plan. She noted there are lots of commercial users and out-of- state users of the Turnpike system. She referred to the presentation which showed the toll rates, and noted with the proposed toll increase NH would be similar to Maine and New Jersey. Good infrastructure is key to economic development and job growth. Safety is important and a safe system is needed to save lives and prevent injuries. **She supports increasing the tolls.**

Paul Worsowicz, of Gallagher, Callahan & Gartrell representing Aggregate Manufacturers Association. He noted that he was raised in Nashua. He reflected on NH before the turnpike system and Interstate system. An investment in infrastructure is an investment in jobs. He commented about the job opportunities as a result of the improvements to the airport access road. He read part of a letter into the record which the City of Concord submitted. There is grid lock in the Bow-Concord area. **The Association supports the toll increase. City of Concord supports the toll increase.**

Robert Sculley, President NH Motor Transport Association. The organization includes about 300 companies, and before tonight there has been limited debate on the topic. Don't see a need for proposed toll increase all projects are funded now. 99% of the goods are moved by trucks. A toll increase would be a hardship for the industry. This is a tourist state- skiers, leaf peepers, and people visiting the lakes. We say we welcome them, but not really with the proposed toll increase. **Opposed to the toll increase.**

Christopher Bean, CLD Engineers/Fuss & O'Neill. He lives in the Concord. He strongly supports the toll increase. He discussed traffic situations in the Concord-Manchester corridor noting there are deficiencies in the system, traffic volumes have increased, difficult driving conditions in winter and in the dark, the Amoskeag Interchange is very dangerous and he often rides in the shoulder for safety. The traffic goes from 60 mph to stop conditions. This is not safe. He had witnessed accidents and near-miss collisions. The highway and interchanges need to be improved, including Exits 6 & 7 in Manchester. The driving navigation Waze app directs him to take Route 3, as the traffic between Manchester and Nashua is often so congested. Without the highway improvements there will be impacts to local roads due to traffic avoiding congestion. The Bow-Concord area on Sunday nights is a real problem. People are

wasting time in the congestion. He doesn't think the tourist would mind spending a little more money, as the improvements would reduce traffic congestion and improved safety. The fact that 55% of the turnpike users are out-of-state; this is an attractive feature of the toll increase. The last toll increase was in 2007, and it is time for an increase. The dollars would be well spent. **Supports the toll increase.**

Steve Brown, Ross Express, Inc. Boscawen. The company has 4 and 5 axle trucks and pay \$ 149,000 in tolls per year. The proposed toll increase would have a substantial impact on their business. Their business is doing well but this would be a financial impact. He noted that the transportation industry has been saddled with many demands, including ELD requirements (Electronic Logging Devices) for drivers, and he noted that these related safety improvements are a good thing. Cost is the issue. Truckers want the road safe. Suggest slowing down the process. As users of the system they are paying their fair share. **Opposed to the toll increase.**

Martin Kennedy, VHB. He noted that he is involved in the planning and design of State transportation projects and has been involved over the years in many public engagement sessions. He briefly discussed the project and public involvement process- identification of the problem, evaluation of data, identifying alternatives and selecting a preferred route. He noted that when people are engaged in the process, they have an expectation that a project will be built and the situation corrected. When they learn that a project may be 7-10 years out in the process prior to construction they are discouraged and disappointed. He noted that costs of projects increases over time. He commented that Exit 6 in Manchester is a real safety issue, between 2009-2011 there were 140 crashes and between 2013-2015 there were 189 crashes, this is a 35% increase. We need to be investing in our infrastructure, and investing in our State for the economic future of NH. **He strongly supports the toll increase.**

Sam Langley, resident of Boscawen. He commented that as presented, he is opposed to the toll increase. He stated that widening is unnecessary and won't decrease congestion in the long-term. Just look at California, they have places with 8-10 lanes in one direction. Repaving is necessary not widening. He noted that large trucks do a lot of damage to the roads and bridges. He commented that there have been federal and state studies which have documented the impact of trucks on roads, and an 18 wheeler's impact is equivalent to 9,200 cars. Private cars subsidize the truck industry. Truckers should pay their fair share, and a proportional rate should be considered. Trucks aren't the only option in town, there are other modes for transporting of goods. He suggested that the toll increase proposal be reworked, and that the State consider the various studies he mentioned. He is also available to meet to discuss the studies and if anyone has any further questions. **Opposed to the toll increase.**

Peter Somssich, NH State Representative from Portsmouth, Ward 3. He commented that he is impressed by the work of NHDOT. He participated in the GACIT meeting and heard the NHDOT presentation on the Ten Year Plan. He expressed the process is too long. He noted that people before us contributed to improvement investments that we all use today and we should do the same for future users. The Pannaway neighborhood of Portsmouth has been waiting 40 years for noise abatement. The comment made this evening about the windfall coming from the federal government in Washington, D. C. is an example of "Fake news." Need to see this from a cost-benefits analysis. The proposed roadway

improvements have many benefits including- quicker commute times, safer travel environment, reduced construction time. This is an Investment, not a tax. He suggested that maybe more hearings are needed. There is an acute need for noise abatement and a funding mechanism has been proposed that will work. **He supports the toll increase.**

Val Parrot, R & M Freight of South Hampton. He lives in Massachusetts but his company is in NH. He noted that he requires his drivers to use I-95, not secondary roads such as Route 107 as they often transport oversized loads and it is safer. Route 107 intersection in Seabrook is a traffic jam. Tolls are an expense; he referred to the New York toll fee of \$125 one-way for his trucks. He mentioned Canadian truckers don't pay the tolls and that the State Police are supposed to stop violators. **He is opposed to the increase.**

Joshua Whitehouse, Farmington. He is opposed to increase, as it will cost about \$1,638 for someone to just go to work if using the turnpike, up from \$358. **He is opposed to the increase.**

Corrine Baker, Hampton. She noted that she travels to Portsmouth four (4) times a week, and she prefers to travel the faster route (I-95). She asked why there is a 30% discount for passenger vehicles with NH responders. She asked if all EZ Pass holders get a discount. Chris Waszczuk explained that the 30% discount is granted per NH Legislative authorization and EZ-Pass responders purchased in NH get the discount regardless of residency. Ms. Baker commented that NH roads are the best. It is a matter of time or money, when choosing what road to use. She noted that she is not sure if she supported or opposed the toll increase. Provided **comments only.**

Jim Howe, City Fuel Manchester NH, and Dave's Septic. This will affect small businesses. They pay about \$13,000 in tolls per year. This is a serious impact. This will affect their ability to compete. This is also a cost to his employees. They support some NH charities, and this may affect their ability to support them. The elderly and others that live on federal assistance are also affected. Suggest offering NH business owners an easy pass discount. **Opposed to the toll increase.**

Kathleen Logan, Portsmouth. She read/heard that the NH Legislature said they were blind-sided by this plan. We need to improve the toll experience. The Hampton tolls are out of date and should be updated to open road tolling. In the summer the tolls don't really work, back-ups and congestion. She commented there isn't a decent rest area along the Hampton toll area, and the Hampton tolls bring in the most money. Councilor Volinsky noted the improvements to the Hooksett tolls plaza and rest areas. Chris Waszczuk commented that the NHDOT recognizes the issues at the Hampton tolls, there are only two lanes for open tolling. **Supports the toll increase.**

Frank Smart, Dead River Company, Somersworth. He commented the process is being too accelerated. He wants his employees and customers to be safe. This needs to be worked through the Legislative process. **Opposed to the toll increase.**

Manuel Garganta, Sherburne Civic Association, Portsmouth. He has lived in the neighborhood for 50 years and his wife has lived there her own life. The neighborhood existed before I-95 was built. He

attended the GACIT hearing in Portsmouth. Noise is a real issue and raises quality of life issues. There is also a gas transfer station in the area that is a concern. **He supports the toll increase, need sound wall.**

Alex Koutroubas, American Council of Engineering Companies (ACEC-NH). He commented that the engineering community applauds NHDOT. He read a statement into the record. The toll rates have not kept up with inflation. Exit 6 in Manchester, built in 1950s is rated one of the top 5 dangerous intersections in NH. The miles of toll roads have increased. Infrastructure is an asset. Strongly support the toll increase, they have great confidence in NHDOT, the process has been transparent- there were over 20+ public hearings and what is presented is a balanced proposal. **Strongly supports the toll increase.**

Aaron Garganta, Sherburne Civic Association, Portsmouth. Noise is a habitual issue in this neighborhood. The association supports the sound barriers. The turnpike is a main artery of the State. He made an analogy to the movie "Field of Dreams", if you build it they will come. He then referenced the people that come would expect good roads and accommodations to get to the field. The Type II noise abatement policy is the most uplifting news they have heard in years. **Supports the toll increase.**

Carmine Sarno, M& S Logistics of Candia. He owns a small trucking company of about 25 trucks. Their monthly toll bill about \$1,200. He noted that his business is doing alright but there are numerous financial burdens on his company. Other NH issues included insurance for small businesses, aging workforce, and retaining and attracting new drivers. Urges a more moderate proposal. He lives off Route 3A in Manchester; he will be impacted by the noise from people avoiding the tolls. There will also be an impact to safety. He remarked no employers would benefit from the discount as currently presented. He remarked there needs to be more input from businesses. **Opposes the proposal in its current form.**

Michael Griffin, A.H. Harris & Sons, Inc. He commented he is a lifelong resident of Portsmouth. Safety is a vital role in tourism. He is confident in NHDOT. He commented on the wisdom of former Governor Lynch (2007) regarding the toll issue. **He supports the toll increase.**

Jonathan Wyckoff, Creek & Christian Shore Neighborhood Chairman, Portsmouth. He commented that the Franklin Elementary School is adjacent to Route 95, and is the only school accessed by the bridge (red list bridge). The 2007 toll increase has not kept up with inflation. He was hoping politics wouldn't come into play with the toll increase discussion. This is not a tax, not a democrat or republican problem. We can better use our money by not delaying projects, as projects cost more by putting them off. **He supports the toll increase.**

Rick Becksted, Portsmouth neighborhood. He commented that he participated in the Ten Year Plan process about 4 years ago. In addition to the noise, the congestion on I-95 in proximity may be causing carbon monoxide issues near the elementary school. He also announced there is a petition by the Pannaway neighborhood available for signatures. **He supports the toll increase.**

[Adjournment:](#)

Meeting adjourned at 8:12 p.m.

Written comments received:

James Jalbert, C&J Limousine: **Supports toll increase**

Christopher Bean, CLD Engineers/Fuss & O'Neill: **Supports toll increase**

Gary Abbott, Associated General contractors of New Hampshire: **Supports toll increase**

Thomas Aspell Jr, Concord City Manager: **Supports toll increase**

Eileen Cabanel, Merrimack Town Manager: **Supports toll increase**

Supports	17
Opposed	14
Comments Only	2