



## Too many unanswered questions on truck tolls

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To the Editor:

Take a look at the RoadWorks website. How could anyone who lives, works or travels through Rhode Island dispute the fact that our infrastructure is in deplorable condition? The photograph of the busted and sinking storm grate could have been taken anyplace in our State. We need the repairs and we certainly need the jobs. The question is: do we need the tolls?

I read H-7409. The described maintenance and rehab to our roads and bridges will certainly provide significant employment beyond building 14 toll gantries. So why must those two actions be linked hand-in-hand?

If you read any of the long-term studies regarding toll roads, you'll find that traffic forecasts are typically exaggerated and in many cases just plain wrong. JP Morgan and Standard & Poor's have documented overestimations of revenue up to 30 percent of projected figures. Among the many reasons for these errors are the miscalculation or overestimation of users' willingness to pay a toll, unforeseen improvements to competitor routes, fewer off peak and weekend trips and an overestimation of truck traffic. Additionally, the Value Of Time (VOT) for truckers varies greatly depending upon their market segment and how they absorb tolling. Does the trucking company value a transportation system to save time, distance or money?

What were the assumptions, estimated values and modeling the State of RI relied upon before fast-tracking this legislation? Was there an independent, nonbiased evaluation made with regards to forecasted revenue and forecasted traffic? What were the results of the calculated Risk Assessment? What other funding options did they explore?

The General Assembly, in H-7409 states "GARVEE bonds should be utilized to fund the bridge replacement, reconstruction, and maintenance component of the 10-year capital program known as RhodeWorks." In 2014, Moody's downgraded 17 GARVEE bond ratings which negatively

impacted over \$6 billion in outstanding debt. RI was one of those effected states.

H-7409 further states the “General Assembly hereby approves financing not to exceed three hundred million dollars (\$300,000,000) in principal amount of GARVEE Bonds, the repayment of which shall be derived from and supported by FHWA funds due the State of Rhode Island. The term of the GARVEE bonds shall not exceed fifteen (15) years and the total debt service on the GARVEE bonds shall not exceed four hundred ninety million dollars (\$490,000,000).” So, what happens if the money is not there when it’s time to pay the feds back? Can we afford an overly optimistic toll revenue forecast?

Once upon a time, Rhode Island looked for a way to shore up its sinking Education. We took the federal dollars attached to “No Child Left Behind.” Now every child is left behind. Our legislators blew the dust off their old baseball cards when Curt Shilling came to town and we know who is left holding the bag marked “38 Studios.” H-7409 offers a less than transparent shove towards a Tolls Bill that is being fast-tracked down our legislators’ throats. I fear we are not all going to “live happily ever after” on this one either, folks. Please contact your Reps and Senators.

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