

Industry leaders applaud approval of Tory's toll plan

by Angela Gismondi Dec 19, 2016

Now that Toronto Mayor John Tory's toll plan for the Gardiner Expressway and the Don Valley Parkway (DVP) has been given the green light by council, members of the construction industry state they are eager to see what comes next, with several in strong support of the idea.



Toronto Mayor John Tory's proposed toll plan for the Gardiner Expressway and the Don Valley Parkway was supported by Toronto council recently. A final decision on the tolls will not be made until next year and it needs approval by the provincial government. If the tolls are approved, they could be phased in starting in 2019 and would be fully implemented by 2024. - Photo: HALJACKEY/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

"We commend mayor Tory and his council for taking such bold and decisive leadership," said Ashley De Souza, director of government relations for the Ontario Road Builders' Association (ORBA).

"Traffic congestion has become the number one issue affecting economic growth and social prosperity in Ontario and it's great to see the City of Toronto is looking at dedicated funding to repair our crumbling infrastructure assets."

In its final meeting of the year on Dec. 13, Toronto council debated revenue tool options to fund road and transit projects to ease congestion and meet future growth needs in the city and voted 32 to nine in favour of imposing road tolls on the city-owned highways.

Martin Collier, founder of Transport Futures, also commended the mayor for taking a leadership role and attaining council support.

"That's such an important part of making road pricing happen in Canada, you need that political leadership, knowledge and understanding," he said.

Andy Manahan, executive director of the **Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario**, said council approval reflects the position that a property tax hike wasn't in the cards.

"Even those who may have experienced some reservation at the beginning recognized something had to be done. I think it was being presented as an either/or option to a certain degree, that if you didn't do this, property tax was going to have to increase and I think the mayor already made a commitment that wasn't going to happen," Manahan noted.

A road toll of \$2 would raise more than \$200 million for the City of Toronto every year, Tory stated when he announced the plan at the Toronto Region Board of Trade in September.

That money would be dedicated exclusively to pay for the \$33 billion in unfunded infrastructure and transit projects in the city.

However, the \$2 flat rate Tory has suggested would not ease traffic congestion, Collier claims. He recommends dynamic pricing instead.

"It evens out the flow," said Collier.

"It's a different price at different times of the day... it depends on the level of congestion. When you start using dynamic pricing, some people will leave sooner, some people will take transit. If we can get some diversion, people will get that reliable trip."

He also said the rate should be more comparable to the Highway 407 Electronic Toll Route or a TTC token.

"John Tory, the province, are trying to catch up on 20 years of not building multi-modal infrastructure but we've got to start somewhere and this is a way of getting the money to build it," Collier commented.

Stakeholders shared the view that money needs to be earmarked specifically for transit and transportation projects.

"This money is coming from transportation, it's being paid by drivers and it should go back into the transportation system to make the drive and transit and active transportation easier for people to get around," said Collier. "You will get broader support if it doesn't go into general revenue."

"From ORBA's standpoint, our members standpoint, it's ensuring there is that dedicated funding and that consistent revenue stream that is able to address the infrastructure needs of the city," added De Souza.

"For too long, city governments have been talking about different types of policies and different types of revenue models and really talking about plans and not building. This will get on with the

action of actually building infrastructure in Toronto."

The DVP and Gardiner will require work to accommodate the tolls, which translates into jobs for the construction industry, Manahan noted.

"I think there could be work for engineers, contractors and lots of skilled trades to do that work in the road building and bridge building sector," he stated.

While all the details are not yet known, a staff report on how the tolls will be structured and the technology that will be used is expected next year. A final decision will not be made until next year and it needs approval by the provincial government.

"There are still lots of hurdles to overcome. Certainly they have to get provincial approval to go ahead and do road pricing on the DVP and the Gardiner, but I gather other than the opposition parties, the Kathleen Wynne government seems to be sending out the right signals that this is a local decision," said Manahan.

However, there could be some backlash, Manahan warned.

"Where it's going to become messier in the future is will other municipalities take retributive action with respect to if you're charging 905ers, now we're going to charge 416ers to go on our roads," Manahan stated.

"I have heard some rumblings about that — idle threats at this stage, but you never know. If that does start to happen then it would be better if the province could step in and say let's have some common rules as to how this is going to be done."

If the tolls are approved, they could be phased in starting in 2019 and would be fully implemented by 2024. Collier hopes it will be rolled out sooner and that the provincial government should help make that happen.

"We're just saying you've got to move faster than that because a big thing is to get money for infrastructure now," said Collier. "We think 2019 is doable."