

## Province shuts down road toll plan for Gardiner, DVP

by Angela Gismondi Feb 6, 2017

The provincial government has put the brakes on plans to implement tolls on two major Toronto highways and has instead opted to increase gas tax funding to be put towards transit projects.

Several stakeholders in the construction and transportation sectors state they think Premier Kathleen Wynne's decision is a move in the wrong direction.

Wynne was in Richmond Hill, Ont. on Jan. 27 to announce that the province will not approve tolls for the city-owned Gardiner Expressway and Don Valley Parkway (DVP), a recommendation put forward by Toronto Mayor John Tory and endorsed by city council in December.

"It's such an easy thing to say I'm against tolls and it's too expensive, but they're not looking at the big picture of congestion management nor the revenue that can be generated," said Martin Collier, founder of Transport Futures.

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#### **Martin Collier**

Transport Futures

He said it's an issue of power and governance. Since the province has already implemented road pricing with high-occupancy toll (HOT) lanes and the Hwy. 407 East extension, not allowing Toronto to do the same is sending mixed messages, he stated.

"I think this is a great opportunity to say to the province 'you didn't let us toll it so now you take care of it,'" said Collier, adding the two roadways should be provincial roads since they are not only being used by city of Toronto commuters but those in the 905 as well. "Upload the DVP and the Gardiner to the province and they can take care of it. When they're ready they can toll the whole system including the 400 series highways."

Wynne did announce that starting in 2019, Ontario will be increasing funding for local transit through an enhancement to the existing gas tax program, doubling the municipal share from two cents per litre to four cents by 2021.

"We're really excited to hear that municipalities are going to see increased dedicated funding for transit right across the province," said Ashley De Souza, director of government relations at the Ontario Road Builders' Association (ORBA), who was on hand for the announcement.

ORBA applauded Tory when he first announced he would be proposing road tolls for the two Toronto highways.

"We were very clear when Mayor Tory came out with his transit and transportation investment plan that we were very supportive of the leadership that he was taking, not only looking at road tolls but looking at the other measures in terms of generating revenue to pay for transit and transportation and rebuilding the Gardiner," De Souza explained. "While the one option was rejected by the province, we were happy to see them step up with alternative means of funding to address that funding gap."

Wynne said there are currently not enough reliable transit options for drivers and those are needed before revenue-generating measures such as road tolls are implemented.

However, Collier said the province needs to level the playing field if they want people to consider taking transit and road tolling is one way to do that.

"Tolls can't come in until the transit is built but what they're not saying is when transit is built you're going to have to pay for transit," Collier noted. "A transit fee is basically a toll."

Tory previously stated a \$2 toll could raise about \$200 million a year, which would be dedicated to transportation. The funding from the tolls was expected to help tackle Toronto's \$33-billion unfunded transit and infrastructure projects.

**Andy Manahan, executive director of the Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario**, said he was "disappointed that the City of Toronto wasn't given the ability to do something that many of us thought was the right direction to be going in.

"I was looking at this as a congestion management tool. Road pricing, like any other utility that's used for water rates or electricity, is a way to control the flow of traffic during those peak hours," he added.

"The politics ruled the day on this one."

Manahan pointed out many MPPs, especially those in the 905, and opposition leaders were not in favour of tolls.

The Progressive Contractors Association of Canada (PCA) took the opportunity to write an open letter to Tory, recommending an alternative way to pay for transit in the city.

The letter urges Tory to make a formal request to the Ontario government to close a loophole in the Labour Relations Act that forces Toronto, as well as several other municipalities, to tender construction work to contractors affiliated with select unions only.

"We've been saying this for quite some time to the provincial government to take off the handcuffs because it's not just the City of Toronto, there's a number of public entities that are subject to restricted tendering," explained Karen Renkema, senior manager, public affairs for the PCA. "So it's not just an answer for the City of Toronto, it's also an answer for a number of different municipalities that can solve the infrastructure deficit or use the additional revenue in order to deal with crumbling infrastructure across the province."

Research by think-tank Cardus shows that restricting competition has inflated construction costs in Toronto by anywhere from 20 to 30 per cent which could translate into major savings on the \$600 million worth of work the city performs annually, Renkema added.