



## Road tolls called 'inevitable'

How else to raise \$38 billion still needed for Metrolinx transit expansion plan?

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The biggest transportation plan in the Toronto region's history failed to recommend road tolls as a way to pay for billions in needed transit improvements.

But if the absence of tolls from Metrolinx's \$50 billion transit expansion plan suggests the idea is dead, nobody told the 125 people, including almost two dozen from the provincial government, who packed a one-day conference in Toronto last week.

With only \$11.5 billion dollars committed for the plan so far, by the province, the question of where the other \$38.5 billion will come from looms large.

Metrolinx chair Rob MacIsaac reiterated as recently as the weekend that the idea of a road toll or other tax will be easier to sell publicly once transit and other improvements are in place.

A 10-cent-per-kilometre charge on the QEW from Hamilton to Toronto, for example, would cost a commuter about \$260 a month.

But observers like Trent University economics professor Harry

Kitchen maintain it's not a matter of *if* we'll see road tolls, it's *when*.

Municipalities need new ways to pay for aging infrastructure. His research suggests tolls are among the fairest ways of doing that.

"I think it's inevitable; road tolls are going to come," said Kitchen. "The really critical issue in the Greater Toronto Area is that there's got to be some additional financing specifically earmarked for roads and public transit."

"The cities that are responsible for raising their own revenue tend to be more efficient and accountable than those that live off transfers from other levels of government," Kitchen said.

"Road pricing" is being used around the world, from the United States to Sweden and Singapore.

Queen's Park has rejected the idea here for now, though many experts believe resistance to the idea is dropping and experience in other countries shows the public can be sold on the benefits if tolls are rolled out carefully.

Conference organizer Marty Collier, of Healthy Transport Consulting, says an Ontario discussion on road pricing is long overdue.

It needs to happen now, he said, so that people will be familiar with the subject when, in 2013, existing funding runs out and Metrolinx needs to reopen the issue of how to pay for more transit, walking and cycling amenities.

"We're just trying to have a rational discussion about road pricing and can it be used, not just to pay for infrastructure, but also as a way to give people incentives to go with other modes.

"I think people want to see what's happened around the world, learn from other people's successes, other people's failures, and see if it can be applied at some point," he said.

There's more to getting people to take transit than just adding buses or trains in service.

For those who choose to continue driving, he said, "Maybe it's time for people to pay for whatever they actually use."

*With files from the Hamilton Spectator*

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## **ROAD TOLLS AROUND THE WORLD**

### **GERMANY**

For four years, Germany has been using satellite-based tolls to charge heavy trucks – but not cars – for using its roads.

In the past, trucks from elsewhere in Europe could cross Germany without even stopping to buy gas, said Martin Rickmann of Toll Collect GmbH, which operates the system.

An on-board device in the truck receives a satellite signal and calculates the fee depending on the vehicle class.

One-third of the 650,000 on-board devices in use are on foreign trucks. Poland and the Netherlands each have about 50,000 trucks with the devices.

But many European trucks have a selection of devices on the dashboard as they travel across national borders.

An emerging challenge will be to standardize the system, Rickmann said.

The tolls also became an incentive to shippers to operate more efficiently.

Since the tolls were imposed, the proportion of trucks travelling

empty on German highways has fallen to less than 10 per cent. During the same period, train containers increased by 7 per cent.

## **OREGON**

The state has experimented with a satellite-based system of charging people for road use based on miles travelled.

It could eventually replace the gas tax, worth about \$400 million a year, according to Jim Whitty of the Oregon transportation department. Fuel-efficient cars are making it harder to raise the revenue Oregon needs from the gas tax.

The GPS-based system uses satellite signals to track mileage. To mitigate privacy concerns, data is stored only in an on-board device. When the vehicle pulls up to a gas pump, the data in the device can be read via short-range radio frequency and fed into a computer, which then adds the right fee to the driver's bill.

In a 2006-07 test of 285 vehicles, rush-hour driving was cut by 22 per cent. Motorists liked it because they didn't have to buy a transponder or pay monthly bills; they just paid at the pump. What they didn't like was the idea of a flat charge regardless car model.

## **LONDON**

One of the best known road-pricing experiments, London's congestion pricing for travel into the city centre uses photo technology similar to the 407's.

But London's system also offers a cautionary tale, said transport economist Reg Evans.

In 2002, it took about five minutes to travel a single kilometre in central London.

After fees were introduced in 2003, travel time dropped

immediately to 3.5 minutes.

But congestion crept up again, in part because of road work and because road space was redirected for bicycle and pedestrian use.

Motorists barely murmured when the original 5-pound fee went up to 8 pounds, Evans said.

But expansion of the cordoned area last year has been less successful in raising revenue and discouraging car travel.

The expanded west-end segment of the cordoned area is being reconsidered by Mayor Boris Johnson.

"Charging is now on the back burner," Evans said.

## **FRANCE**

France has been putting tolls on roads as a means of paying for them since 1955. It has about 11,000 kilometres of national motorways, of which 8,500 kilometres have tolls.

"Every new section we build, the cost of its infrastructure is covered by the tolls," said Nicolas Mery, of the ministry of ecology and sustainable development.

Big trucks can pay five to six times more than cars on the toll systems, which are operated by private companies. "We want the user to pay for the deterioration of the infrastructure," Mery said.

It costs about 14 euros to take the A1 highway between Paris and Lille, a popular weekend destination two hours north. But to reduce congestion when Parisians head home around dinnertime on Sundays, motorists receive a 25 per cent discount on the toll if they travel between 2:30 and 4:30 p.m. or after 8:30 p.m.

It costs about 7 euros to travel 15 kilometres on France's only urban toll road, the A14, but there's a 30 per cent discount outside rush hour, and cars carrying at least three use it free.

## **HOLLAND**

Holland Congestion is damaging Amsterdam's reputation as one of Europe's most attractive cities, says Germa Bakker. She leads an Amsterdam project that's trying to get a jump on a national satellite-based toll system that will replace all car-related taxes in the Netherlands by 2016.

The city project will concentrate on easing the traffic jams that choke the ring road around the city that feeds the major business districts. Because motorways in tiny Holland also act as local routes, they have many exits - and as a result, a lot of congestion.

It's possible to sit, barely moving, for two hours, Bakker said. And "everyone for whom bus is a good alternative is already taking it."

Bakker's group is also working with companies to start van pools and private bus services and to set up remote business centres. Some 10,000 volunteers are being recruited for the Amsterdam satellite system test, a number that could reduce congestion by 7.1 per cent.

Volunteers will get an allowance of 100 euros a month, comparable to road taxes on a nice car, from which they will pay for each kilometre travelled.

Good behaviour will be rewarded with leftover money. If drivers use more than their allowance, they'll be out of pocket.