

**Thruway Authority Virtual  
Public Hearings  
October 14, 2020**

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Jennifer Givner: Thank you for joining us today. My name is Jennifer Givner and I will be your host and moderator for this afternoon. Due to the impact of COVID-19 and for the safety of all of our staff and our customers, the New York State Thruway Authority is holding three virtual public hearings today is the second day regarding the proposed toll adjustment and other changes that support the statewide conversion to cashless tolling. The meetings are going to be held virtually through Cisco's WebEx and streamed online live at [Thruway.NY.gov](http://Thruway.NY.gov). The Thruway Authority welcomes public input and is providing several ways for the public to comment. You can submit comments by mail, by e-mail or by calling us to sign up to speaking at one of these public hearing. You can just call 518-471-5300. All this information is available on our website [Thruway.ny.gov](http://Thruway.ny.gov).

At this time I'd like to introduce the Thruway Authority's Executive Director Matt J. Driscoll who will detail the toll adjustment proposal. Director Driscoll.

Matt Driscoll: Today's hearing is being held virtually under the authorization granted in Executive Order 202.60 issued back on September 4<sup>th</sup>. Additionally, this meeting fulfills the requirements of section 2804 of the Public Authorities Law to hold public hearings concerning a proposed toll adjustment. These hearings are an opportunity for the public to provide comments about the proposed toll adjustment. All comments will be compiled, assessed, and presented to the Thruway Authority Board of Director's at the December Board Meeting. Your comments are a critical component to this process and I'm pleased that people will give their time to provide input to us. Joining me on the panel today are Matthew Howard, Chief Financial Officer for the Thruway, Karen Osborne, Director of Fiscal Audit and Budget, and Monique Magwood our Assistant Deputy Council.

I ask that all speakers keep their comments specifically to this topic. The panel will listen but we will not engage with speakers. The Thruway Authority has a proposal to adjust tolls on the Thruway beginning January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021. That's the first adjustment since 2010. This adjustment will take effect after the system-wide conversion to cashless tolling next month in November of 2020. The Thruway is a user fee supported highway. It is not funded with any taxpayer support. The investments made to the Thruway each year are funded almost entirely by toll revenues. It is through the reinvestment of those toll dollars that the Thruway continues to be one of the nations safest, most reliable, and most affordable highways. To ensure that funds are properly reinvested, we have developed an innovative and comprehensive assessment management program. This program enables us to use extensive data about pavement and bridge conditions, crash profiles and other important elements of the system to prioritize capital projects and determine the most cost effective and efficient manner to complete those projects. For more than 60 years the Thruway has been essential for commerce and travel in the northeast. Thruway customers in 2019 traveled approximately 8.4 billion vehicle miles on the highway averaging more than 22.8 million vehicle miles each and every day with about one-third of all vehicles coming from out of state. The Thruway, of course, plays a pivotal role in our state's economy connecting cities, rural areas, and tourist destinations. The Authority and its dedicated staff have been working hard as part of our effort to modernize and enhance the amenities and the benefits of the Thruway system.

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In June of this year, we opened the 3.6 mile shared bicycle and pedestrian path on the Governor Mario M. Cuomo Bridge. We're moving ahead to redevelop all 27-service areas along the Thruway. The service areas were originally building back in the 1950s with the last significant redevelopment taking place in the 1990s.

And finally, we're converting to a system-wide cashless tolling project next month which will ease congestion for motorists, reduce idling time and its impact on the environment, and of course, help with the reduction of roadway incidents. These critical upgrades are moving forward even while the Authority has not adjusted tolls in 10 years and toll rates on the Governor Mario Cuomo Bridge which are considerably lower than its counterparts across the northeast. Our proposal has been informed by listening sessions we held in July of 2019 in both Rockland and Westchester Counties. Feedback from those listening sessions as well as recommendations by StanTech, Incorporated, the Thruway Authority's independent traffic engineer were considered in this current toll adjustment proposal.

But before we hear your comments, I want to clarify what this proposal adjustment means to you, our customers. Simply stated, beginning January 1, 2021, New York E-Zpass customers outside of those who use the Governor Mario Cuomo Bridge will not be impacted by the proposal. Toll rates for E-Zpass customers on the rest of the system will remain the same. If a customer does not have an E-Zpass, they will use toll by mail. Equipment on toll gantries will take a picture of the vehicle's license plate and we will send the registered owner of the vehicle a bill in the mail. For those who are toll by mail customers, they will be charged 30% more than the E-Zpass rate in addition to a \$2.00 administrative surcharge per billing statement to cover administrative costs. For passenger vehicles, E-Zpass customer will pay \$.50 more in 2021 and an additional \$.50 more in 2022. As part of our proposal a new resident E-Zpass plan will be offered for residents of Westchester and Rockland County that will keep their rate flat through 2022. A 40% commuter discount plan for E-Zpass customers will continue to be offered.

To reduce commercial congestion on the Governor Mario M. Cuomo Bridge when driver's bridge shop, which they tend to do in that region for the cheapest crossings E-Zpass rates for commercial vehicles on the Governor Mario M. Cuomo Bridge will increase by 31% in 2021 and 30% in 2022. If you do not currently have a New York E-Zpass, I strongly urge you to consider getting one as soon as possible. With E-Zpass there are numerous discount plans to match your needs regardless of how often you travel on the Thruway. With cashless tolling going into effect next month and with the proposed toll rate changes taking place January 1<sup>st</sup>, of 2021, don't wait because now is the time to sign up and get an E-Zpass and start saving money. As another reminder, you also do not need to be a New York resident to obtain a New York State E-Zpass account as well.

So that concludes my portion, I will turn it back to Jennifer I believe we're ready for our first speaker. .

Jennifer Givner: Yes, we are, thank you Director. Now just before we start some brief ground rules. When it's time for you to offer your comments, the host will enable your audio, video will not be enabled. To allow everyone an opportunity to offer comments, each speaker will have a

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maximum of 5 minutes and as a reminder to those of you who are watching, please be aware that you can submit comments to [tollcomments@thruway.ny.gov](mailto:tollcomments@thruway.ny.gov) if you choose not to participate today or tomorrow. At this time we're ready to start. I believe our first speaker is here. We see him in our waiting room. The first speaker is Fred Hiffa is he representing Rebuild New York Now Coalition. Fred I see that your mic is open.

Fred Hiffa: Thank you good afternoon. COVID-19 has challenged all of us in ways we never could have imagined. I'd like to start off by thanking each of you and the entire Thruway staff for their strong efforts to maintain the highest level of safety possible when traveling public on the New York State Thruway System. Rebuild New York Now greatly appreciates the opportunity to discuss impact of the proposed toll adjustments on the conditions of the Thruway's 2800 miles of roadway and 814 bridges and well as the necessity to identify the appropriate funding levels need to stop its deterioration. My name is Fred Hiffa I am here today representing the Rebuild New York Now Coalition. Previously I worked in state service for nearly 2 decades in a rising position First Deputy Commissioner of the New York State Department of Transportation in the year 2000. We believe it is important to review public thruway data which clearly shows that the proposed level of toll increases will do little or nothing to stop a sharp decline in the system's conditions. Unfortunately, the independent traffic engineer's report which was released in December of 2019 when the Board voted to move forward with considering proposed toll increase hasn't been updated to reflect the impact that COVID-19 has had on the agency's finances. In December of 2019, the StanTech report projected proposed toll increase would generate about 4.8% increase in 2021, a 4.3% increase in 2022, a 1% increase in 2023, a 9% increase in 2024. These revenues should be updated based on the impacts COVID-19 has had on the agency's findings. The same report shows that proposed toll increases will provide no additional funding for maintaining its roads and bridges. The 2024 capital project is projected to be \$2.1 billion, the toll increase is at t the exact same level that was projected without the toll increase. Based on the negative financial impact of COVID-19, what will be the reduction in the next capital program if the current total proposal is adopted? According to the Thruway's July monthly financials year to date, total revenues are down 20%. It's important the agency provide updated projections so when \_\_\_\_\_ (echoey) we will be back to pre-COVID-19 levels. It will also be important to know what level of toll increase will now be necessary to fund the proposed 5 year capital program. In its last 5 year capital program from 2016 to 2020 the agency had challenges delivering the program at its projected level. In each of the 5 years, the adopted highway and bridge capital program exceeded the actual program. Over those 4 years, the highway and bridge program was reduced by \$368 million or about 29%. If the Thruway maintains its current levels of capital funding proposed with the toll increase planned, we will continue to see significant deterioration of its roads and bridges. The Thruways' 10 year toll increase has had a devastating impact on the condition of its pavement. In 2007, 9.6% of the Thruway was rated in fair or poor condition. Just 10 years later in 2017, the last year that we have data, 62% of its pavements were rated fair or poor with mile fair to poor percentages translate to 54 miles in 2007 now their report is 253 miles of the system. As you know, the cost of maintaining good conditions is at 65 to 100,000 per mile by allowing them to file their report significantly increased the cost future cost to the agency of about \$1.5 \_\_\_\_\_ (inaudible). As roads deteriorate and become rougher, vehicles increase significant greenhouse gas emissions. According to a recent study at Rucker's researchers found

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significant environmental benefits when pavement surface conditions were smooth. Simply put, keeping pavements in good condition reduces greenhouse gases. As you know, over 500 \_\_\_\_\_ 814 bridges are over 60 years old. Most disturbing in the StanTech report was that the overall bridge conditions will continue to deteriorate in each of the next 4 years. The Thruway needs to have resources available for at least 15 bridges per year not the \_\_\_\_\_. The Thruways engineers do an outstanding job tracking the system's conditions and know the level of funding necessary to maintain these public assets. Regrettably there is currently no correlation between funding levels consistent with needs. The Thruway's roads and bridges are in significantly worse condition today than they were 10 years ago when tolls were last increased. We respectfully suggest that the Thruway Board redraft it's proposed toll plan and submit a broader plan that fully considers the negative impact for which COVID-19 is having on the agency's capital program and addresses the true infrastructure needs of the system. Again, on behalf of Rebuild New York Now membership, thank you very much.

Matt Driscoll: Thank you Fred.

Jennifer Givner: Thank you Fred we appreciate you taking the time to offer some comments today. Our next speaker in line is Phil Partial. Mr. Partial we are unmuting your line right now and you have the floor. Mr. Partial we have your line unmuted but we are not hearing you. Okay Mr. Partial we still are not hearing you on our end we see that you're logged in. We can try to come back Mr. Partial if you want to just check your phone and make sure on your end your audio is connected and is working with the WebEx system. We have someone else go in the meantime. We're just going to mute your line again. There is a way to test it on the audio system and you can always give us a call as well 518-471-5300 and we can walk you through just to make sure we can get that technical aspect fixed. But in the meantime, we're going to move on just to Ms. Beth Jacobs. Ms. Jacobs your line is just waiting to unmute your line and the floor is yours.

Beth Jacobs: Can you hear me?

Jennifer Givner: We can hear you thank you.

Beth Jacobs: Okay cause I have terrible Internet. Okay so I haven't used ah the Thruway for a long time but I have to tell you it's taken over 2 months and I still haven't been able to get a device for my motorcycle. Are you still there?

Jennifer Givner: Yes we're here.

Beth Jacobs: Okay so I don't think that you, I know it just looks like kind of a money grab to me. I'm shocked that the people that make the least money are going to be surcharged by paying by mail and you are aware there are places in New York State that don't have Internet. So I actually am taking a 100 mile chip for work on Sunday and I'm going to take the back roads. I am hoping that I am going to actually get my device in the mail tomorrow. I just spoke to a very

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nice woman but I started trying to get a device for my motorcycle on July 29<sup>th</sup> and I still haven't gotten it yet. Are you still there?

Jennifer Givner: Yes, ma'am we are listening. The panel is listening.

Beth Jacobs: So I don't understand, I see that you've taken the toll booths out. I know that on long trips it's important to be able to stop and to know where you are. I think that's going to encourage road rage and I know it's already underway but I also remind you this was supposed to be free initially. But like I said, if it's taken over 2 months and I still haven't gotten a motorcycle device, all I have now on my account is my motorcycle license plate then what is anybody to believe that you guys and gals over there know what you're doing. I'm hoping I'm going to wake up tomorrow and I realize it's going to have been overnighted to me after I don't know how many phone calls, and faxes and e-mails but if that simple thing can't be handled, then why are we to believe that the millions of commuters going over the Thruway each year are going to be properly handled and when someone hands you change, I know you may find that quaint but its hard to mess that up. But as I said, here we are more than half way through October and I still don't have a device for my motorcycle. That's it.

Matt Driscoll: Thank you.

Jennifer Givner: We appreciate you taking the time to reach out to us. I'm glad a representative was able to help you today and please give us a call back if there are any other issues. Thank you. At this time we're just going to take a brief recess and try to get our other attendee who was unable to get their audio started, try to assist them but we're going to take a brief recess for a few moments. Thank you so much. We have another speaker that has signed up. I have Mr. Frank Coldman. Mr. Coldman we've unmuted your line you have the floor.

Frank Coldman: Yes, I would like to know how it is that all of this is very ill participated in. Because I just finished going through a nightmare trying to find the location, find the link, I've sent 2 e-mails according to the thing and I kept hearing about how the first day you only had 1 maybe commenter and I have to put it out there, many of the meetings that you guys held in the past have been in person at places and times that most of the general public cannot make it. Now here we go again now with zoom meetings where you have so insulated yourself that people cannot find the link. I literally sent two e-mails, no response and then I finally had to call and get help from a Senator and then finally I ended up having to call after this meeting already proceeded. So my first point would be that if you're going to hold public commentary and expect it, you need to make it public commentary friendly. If you're going to hold it in person, hold it in places that you agree to where people can make it because many of the ones that I've seen in the past were changed at the last minute, frustrate the public, they don't go or they're during the day when most of us work. I happened to have taken the day off today to just do this.

My second point is when is all this taxation going to stop? I mean right now you have New York in mass exodus leaving, leaving because of Cuomo's practices and trickled down by you guys and other departments, you're taxing us to death. You're the most unfriendly business state in the nation and you're not getting the hit that all the businesses are leaving, the debt's going up. I

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mean you can't make up the tax deficit or the deficit numbers that Cuomo has like a drunken sailor or a bad gambler run up. You can't.

Jennifer Givner: Mr. Coldman. These are comments limited to the toll adjustment. If there is anything else on that we're happy to listen to you.

Frank Coldman: Okay well it all goes down to you can't raise taxes and tolls and fees on a state hoping to make up a deficit and make up money because what you're doing instead is the reverse opposite. You're pushing people away. If you wanted to do anything to increase the budget it would be to increase the traffic and the business and what you're doing is the exact opposite, you're pushing people away. I'm a professional trucker and I'll tell you right now that we don't want those E-Zpass governmental tracking things because they're more governmental control than they are revenue based. And you're just going to see a mass exodus if you keep raising taxes and raising fees and doing this. You're looking at destroying New York and that is my opinion and I'm going to watch where the money goes because you know what, the last time you guys proposed this I went to the meeting in Buffalo and sure enough those two guys that were proposing it they didn't get it done and they didn't get their raise and their promotion. If they would have gotten it done and gotten the toll increases, I'm certain that they'd probably be sitting in your seats now. So we're going to be watching every one of you guys and see if you pass this toll increase where the money really went. Thank you.

Jennifer Givner: Thank you Mr. Coleman we appreciate your comments. At this time we are going to head back into a brief recess until we have someone else signed up to speak. Thank you very much.

This concludes today's public hearing for the Thruway Authority. We'll host our final session tomorrow from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. If you'd like to sign up please give us a call 518-471-5300. Please e-mail us [tollcomments@thruway.ny.gov](mailto:tollcomments@thruway.ny.gov). We'll be able to sign you up to speak tomorrow. Comments are going to be limited to the proposed toll adjustment. In the meantime thank you, have a good night and we'll see everyone tomorrow.