

**Thruway Authority Virtual  
Public Hearings  
October 13, 2020**

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Jennifer Givner: Good afternoon and thank you for joining us today. My name is Jennifer Givner and I will be your host and moderator for this afternoon's public hearing. 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 will hold three virtual public hearings regarding the proposed toll adjustment and other changes that will support the statewide conversion to cashless tolling. The meetings will be held virtually through Cisco's WebEx Events and streamed live online at [Thruway.NY.gov](http://Thruway.NY.gov). The Thruway Authority welcomes public input. It is providing several ways for the public to comment. You can submit comments by mail, by e-mail or you can call us directly even during this hearing to sign up to speak. Dial 518-471-5300 we have representatives standing by and they're happy to get you lined up for speaking events today.

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: ...State Thruway Authority. Today's hearing is the first of three virtual public hearings regarding the Thruway Authority's proposed toll adjustment on the Thruway beginning January of 2021. Due to the ongoing public health crisis imposed by COVID-19 today's hearing is being held virtually under the authorization granted in Executive Order 202.60 issued on September 4<sup>th</sup>. Additionally, this meeting fulfills the requirements of section 2804 of the Public Authorities Law to hold public hearing concerning a proposed toll adjustment. These hearings are an opportunity for the public to provide comments about the proposed toll adjustment. These comments will be compiled, assessed and presented to the Thruway Authority Board of Director's at the December Board Meeting. Your comments are critical to this process and I'm pleased that people will give their time to provide input. 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, Assistant Council.

I ask that all speakers keep their comments to this topic. The panel will listen but we will not engage with speakers. The Thruway Authority has proposed to adjust tolls on the Thruway beginning January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021. That's the first adjustment since 2010. This adjustment will take place after the conversion to cashless tolling system-wide 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 a very 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 per day with about one-third of all vehicles coming from out of state. The Thruway plays a vital 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 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. The state of the art path features 6 overlooks, areas on the bridge that are resting points reflecting the culture and history of the Lower Hudson Valley. Digital kiosks, interpretive signage, and public art. Visitor parking, restrooms, bicycle repair stations and other amenities along with connectivity to local bicycle and pedestrian networks are available at the Rockland and Westchester landings. To date, more than 200,000 guests have visited the path. This year, after a competitive bidding process, we selected an entity to redevelop all 27-service areas along the Thruway. These upgrades will include greater food and service offerings, environmental initiatives, technological upgrades and commercial trucking amenities. The service areas were originally built back in the 1950s with the last significant redevelopment taking place in the 1990s.

And finally, the third transformative modernization component is the conversion to cashless tolling system-wide next month. The implementation to cashless tolling will ease congestion for our motorists, reduce idling time and its impact on the environment, and help with the reduction of roadway incidents. The Thruway Authority has not adjusted tolls in 10 years and toll rates on the Governor Mario Cuomo Bridge are considerably lower than its counterparts across the entire northeast. Our proposal has been informed by listening sessions we held in July of 2019 by a Toll Advisory Panel in both Rockland and Westchester Counties. These revisions reviewed all toll rates, potential resident and commuter discount programs, and commercial vehicles rates on the Governor Mario M. Cuomo Bridge. Feedback from those listening sessions as well as recommendations by Stan Peck, Incorporated the Thruway Authority's independent traffic engineer were considered in this current toll adjustment proposal.

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 tolls by mail. Equipment on 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 toll rate in addition to a \$2.00 administrative surcharge per billing statement. Similar differential toll administrative surcharges are standard among other systems across the nation. The differences in the rates are due to the Thruway Authority's increased cost for handling tolls by mail transactions. For passenger vehicles, tolls on the Governor Mario Cuomo Bridge will be adjusted as follows: by 2022 E-Zpass customer will pay \$5.75 that's an increase of \$.50 beginning in January of 21 and \$.50 in January of 22. As part of our proposal a new resident E-Zpass plan will be offered for Westchester and Rockland County residents that will keep their rate flat through 2022. The program will be offered to passenger vehicles with an E-Zpass who opt into the plan and can provide proof of residency such as documentation showing their vehicle is registered in one of the two counties. The commuter discount plan for E-Zpass customers will continue to be offered. The proposal is for a 40% discount off of the E-Zpass rate for passenger vehicles that qualify and opt into this program.

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To reduce commercial congestion on the Governor Mario M. Cuomo Bridge when driver's bridge shop for the cheapest crossings and create additional traffic, adjustments to commercial toll rates on the bridge will more closely align with the other major crossings in the New York metropolitan area. E-Zpass rates for commercial vehicles on the Governor Mario M. Cuomo Bridge will increase by 31% in 2021 and 30% in 2022. For example, a toll for a tractor-trailer with 5 axles and an E-Zpass account will increase to \$55.77 during peak hours in 2022 compared to \$90 at the George Washington Bridge. And even with the adjustment, the commercial toll rate on the Governor Mario M. Cuomo Bridge in 2022 will still be 38% less than it is on the George Washington Bridge. So 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 rates taking effect on January 1<sup>st</sup>, of 2021, don't wait because now is the time to sign up and get that New York E-Zpass and start saving money. And again, you also do not need to be a New York resident to obtain a New York State E-Zpass.

So thank you I think we're ready to begin today's session. I will turn it back to Jen who can introduce our first speaker.

Jennifer Givner: Great thank you Director I appreciate it. Just a few ground rules before we begin with our speakers today. When it's time for you to offer your comments, the host will enable your audio, you will see you are muted right now but when you get introduced your audio will be unmuted. Video will not be enabled during this session. To allow everyone an opportunity to offer comments, each speaker will have a maximum of 5 minutes and there will be a countdown clock. We just ask you to be courteous of other speakers. And again, as a reminder for those of you who just may be watching, please be aware that you can submit comments via e-mail to [tollcomments@thruway.ny.gov](mailto:tollcomments@thruway.ny.gov). You can give us a call right now we can send you the WebEx link and you can offer the comments during the next 2 hour period as well. Other than that, we thank you. This is a critically important process that we are going through, we appreciate everyone's participation.

Now I would like to introduce our first speaker today, Senator David Carlucci. Senator Carlucci your line it's open.

Senator Carlucci: Well good afternoon and thank you for having me today and thank you for having this extremely important hearing today. I'm Senator David Carlucci and I represent parts of Rockland and Westchester Counties and I want to congratulate the Thruway Authority on the completion of the new bridge and as was mentioned, the 200,000 people that have visited the pedestrian path, I'm one of them and it's a great asset to our community. So, thank you for that. And thank you for the work that you do in safeguarding and improving this wonderful asset that we have of the Thruway Authority in New York State.

I wanted to bring to the attention of the Board the issue of tolls by mail. The fact is that my office alone has received hundreds of cases of residents throughout the community that have really been in a bad situation due to the tolls by mail. I just wanted to bring up a recent example

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of someone from this year actually a nurse on the frontline working in New York City but living in Rockland County, in the midst of the COVID pandemic that we've been experiencing, she was faced with \$160.00 in tolls that were outstanding but then was hit with \$3260 worth of fines and that is not a unique experience. This is something that we've seen over and over again so there's been a deal of complexity and a problem with people being able to participate in the tolls by mail. So I want to bring that to everyone's attention because I think there is some things that we can do. I want to thank the Thruway Authority for freezing the tolls for Rockland and Westchester E-Zpass holders. What I would ask is that you consider extending that freeze to all Rockland and Westchester residents. I've seen that many of the people that can least afford these fees and these higher tolls are some of the residents that can least afford it. And this has had a spiral effect where many of the residents where I have personally dealt with have accumulated fines that have now spilled over into other parts of their life and has just been snowballing effect for an economic personal disaster for them.

The other thing that we really need to keep in mind in preserving and keeping that toll as low as possible is the fact that we do travel between Rockland and Westchester Counties quite often and that I believe that when companies, when businesses are looking to locate in Rockland and Westchester Counties, that they are considering how much it does cost for their residents to get to work. And that's why keeping the toll as low as possible for all of our residents has to be a priority and we have to make sure that we're not pennywise and pound foolish. We also have to consider that the MTA has been threatening to reduce service west of the Hudson. And for residents, particularly in Rockland County, if you don't have mass transit or if you don't have a car, you're in a really bad situation because the options for mass transit are limited, and I'm hopeful though that we can continue to work towards having more mass transit options particularly having mass transit across the new bridge, to have rail eventually. I think now is the time to start planning for that.

And one other consideration or a couple more just a couple more; the first is this surcharge of \$2.00 when there is a billing statement. I understand that the motivation is to try to get more people to enroll in E-Zpass and we should be doing everything we can to get people into some sort of method like that. However that is a very heavy handed approach and something that could just exacerbate people's financial situations. So a policy as in maybe making it know that fines are forgiven if people do enroll in E-Zpass within a certain period of time making that a well known solid policy could be something that could be beneficial.

The last thing I'll leave you with is just one of the concerns that I've had as a New York State Senator is my ability to really understand by reviewing the contract that the Thruway Authority has with Conduit. The entity or one of the entities that is doing the work of cashless tolling or tolls by mail. I would like to as a Senator but then also as a private resident and someone that uses the Thruway be able to really see and understand the ins and outs of that contract and know exactly what is going on. This technology is increasing and becoming more successful as we move on in terms of data recognition and the photographs that are being taken. However we really need to understand what is the incentive, the motivations, the revenue that the private companies are making as well as the Thruway Authority on cashless tolling when fines are being levied, when tolls are being collected. What would help is a level of transparency in making

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those documents more accessible to the public and to elected officials; I believe that would be helpful to all of us.

And lastly, I appreciate you listening to our comments from the meeting in July of 2019 and following through with having a toll freeze for E-Zpass holders in Rockland and Westchester, I would ask that you have the Toll Advisory Panel meet more frequently and try more to engage with all members of the community to make sure they can participate and work collaboratively with the Thruway authority to increase the benefit that the Thruway Authority is adding to the public. So with that I thank you for your time today, thank you for listening to me and look forward to continuing to work with you to make New York a place where we're investing in the infrastructure. Thank you so much.

Matt Driscoll: Thank you Senator.

Jennifer Givner: Thank you Senator Carlucci. The next individual that we have signed up to speak today is Walter Pacholczak with the Associated General Contractors. Your line Walter is unmuted you can go ahead.

Walter Pacholczak: Thank you Jennifer and good afternoon Thruway Authority Executive Director Matt Driscoll and all of today's participants of this virtual public hearing about the proposed toll adjustment. I am Walter Pacholczak, Vice President of Government Affairs for the Associated General Contractors of New York State also known as AGC. AGC is the leading statewide trade association for New York's construction industry representing union and open shop businesses. We represent nearly 600 contractor, subcontractor and related firms and have more than 80 years of experience working with public agencies and private developers to develop quality projects that are the lifeblood of our economy. AGC members perform the majority of public and private transportation building, and environmental infrastructure work in every region of New York State. I thank you for holding this important public hearing to discuss the proposed toll adjustment. Today's public comments will briefly discuss the challenges of working safely during the COVID-19 pandemic and support for toll adjustments on the Governor Mario M. Cuomo Bridge as well as the entire Thruway system. From the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Governor Cuomo's executive orders deemed most construction as an essential business. The members of AGC, which already had a significant experience applying rigorous work zone safety protocols, and utilizing personal protective equipment developed and honed a comprehensive plan of best practices to mitigate health risks for construction workers. The construction industry informed by that experience and driven by our abiding commitment to safety was exceptionally well prepared to continue moving the Thruway Authority capital program forward during the pandemic. AGC members have been involved in constructing the 570 lane miles of thruway and the 809 bridges since the 1950s with the balance of our membership relying on the mainline corridors as an effective means of transportation and critical lines for material trucking. This proposed toll adjustment is a first step to a more sustainable toll increase that meets the Thruway's needs to improve pavement conditions and rebuild bridges that are more than 60 years old. That is why AGC is supportive of the toll adjustments on the Governor Mario M. Cuomo Bridge as well as the entire Thruway system. With the current toll freeze in effect, the road and bridge conditions have steadily deteriorated to a point where the

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revenues generated do not meet the system's needs. The StanTech consulting report prepared for the Thruway Authority found that since 2007, pavement conditions rated as poor or fair increased from 9.6% to 62%. The conditions of the Thruway's 809 bridges were continued to deteriorate because 492 bridges are more than 60 years old and require replacement. The deteriorating Thruway infrastructure will continue to lead to costly bridge rehabilitation and replacements on the 809 bridges and jurisdiction as well as full depth pavement repairs as the system continues to age. In addition to keeping the existing system in a state of good repair, it is critical that the Thruway continue to advance both safety and technology to benefit the economy and New York State. While the significant financial impacts of the new Governor Mario M. Cuomo Bridge and the highly anticipated cashless tolling system are still unknown, it is clear that increased revenues will be required to continue to maintain and upgrade the Thruway system. With the most recent toll adjustment made nearly a decade ago, the Thruway Authority relies heavily on tolling and bonding thus making it necessary to increase revenues. This proposed toll adjustment is a first step to a more sustainable toll increase that meets needs to improve pavement conditions and rebuild the bridges that are more than 60 years old. Thank you for your time and the opportunity to provide public comments. We look forward to continuing these important toll adjustments discussions with the public, elected officials, and businesses to address the fiscal and infrastructure needs of the Thruway Authority.

Matt Driscoll: Thank you Walt.

Jennifer Givner: Thank you Walter we appreciate your time today. Next up we have Aleta Dupris we are now unmuting your line and you can go ahead.

Aleta Dupris: Good afternoon thank you Director Matt Driscoll and members of the panel. Aleta Dupris, for the record. My pronouns are she and her, it's good to be with you. And today I'm going to be talking specifically about these matters of cashless tolling and the associated regulations thereof. This is a new program highly anticipated and it is important because it is new there obviously will be questions. And it is a program I support as I am a lifelong user of the Thruway. I come to you simply as an ordinary user of transportation including the Thruway and also various other transportation systems such as New York City's MTA. And I have driven the Thruway in my own personal vehicles and also in commercial setting. Most of my thruway usage was pre E-Zpass though I lived in Oklahoma in the early 90s and the Pike pass came out and I was one in that first user group. So I was introduced to this technology a long time ago and it works. E-Zpass is really the ideal because it offers the seamless method of being able to traverse the road with a minimum of friction. And it's also a valid form of savings. And it's important that we emphasize the use of E-Zpass because people are practicing savings when they use their cars and trucks, etc. because when you fill up your fuel tank which is typically about once a week you prepay. You have a little savings account in your fuel tank. So the E-Zpass is much the same. So the concept really isn't new it's just about applying this concept of E-Zpass to those who may not have used it yet. E-Zpass is something that really should be as essential as your license plates and your driver's license, insurance card, and a tank of fuel. We can't legislate that but certainly we can emphasize that through education and positivity. I do believe in the importance of the toll by mail component because I remember in the days of pre E-Zpass when I would travel the Thruway and I would have to meticulously count out my money and I

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often did that getting exact change as a courtesy to the toll collectors and to make it easy for myself and I did keep copies of the toll schedules and I was willing to do that. And toll collection management is a difficult line of work. And so what this toll by mail will do is people won't have to worry about whether they have the cash in their pocket or purse or little jar in their vehicle, it is in a way an extension of credit. Therefore I do see it reasonable that there be a differential, a small increase in using toll by mail, because toll by mail is in fact kind of an extension of credit. I mean really when you enter the mainline system, any part of the Thruway you are extending us credit until we finish our trip and settle up at the exit. I think that's reasonable. Certainly I would hope for electronic invoicing and other methods to make a seamless experience with toll by mail because not everybody is going to have an E-Zpass. I would like to see it get as close to 100% as possible. Certainly apps and in car software I would hope would be a part of this to complement the transponder fleet if you will because technology is evolving. So we want our policies to be able to stay with technology. So I am eagerly anticipating this new system coming online to continue to be proactive with working through our issues because I believe that cashless tolling is the future and it's a tool for congestion management and flexibility in pricing such as time of day use pricing. So I think this plan that you have is reasonable. As I close here, I look forward to you moving forward. I remember the days of paying cash and I also remember the days of having through Thruway Credit cards will all the little holes in them and maybe we should save some of those for historical record. I look forward to the Board passing this item and to you setting a date to commence this most important system. Thank you.

Jennifer Givner: Thank you. At this time we are going to take just a brief recess. We have some individuals signing up to speak and getting logged in right now. So we're going to take a brief recess. You'll see some holding slides for just a few moments. Again, if you wish to comment and you wish to sign up it's not too late please give us a call 518-471-5300. We can get you connected with the link get you signed up. Thank you so much.

At this time we're going to conclude today's public hearing. Thank you for joining us. We have two more sessions; one tomorrow from 4:00 to 6:00 p.m. and another on Thursday from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. There's still time to send us an e-mail to sign up or to give us a call 518-471-5300. But for today this concludes the rest of the day. The link will be posted again on our website at [Thruway.ny.gov](http://Thruway.ny.gov) you can probably log on a few minutes before the hearing starts tomorrow. But thank you for joining us this evening.