

**Transportation Committee
January 31, 2020
Department of Transportation Public Hearing**

Senator Leone, Representative Lemar and members of the Transportation Committee,

Good Afternoon Chairmen and members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony. My name is Ned Statchen, I am a Transportation Engineer with 33 years of experience at DOT and I am a past President of the P-4 Bargaining Unit and past Board member of CSEA. To be clear, I am not here as an official spokesperson for the Department.

I am here to talk about Consultants and Tolls. The Department could operate on far less money if we had more staff Engineers and Inspectors and less Consultants being used. The fact that we are less costly is not even in dispute with the Department and that takes into consideration health and retirement benefits as well. Do not forget that our contracts with the Consultants includes their Burden, Fringe and Overhead or BFO. That means we pay a portion of their healthcare, retirement, rent, utilities and they still get a guaranteed Profit Margin. We used to be able to limit their overhead costs but a couple decades ago, the Federal Transportation Budget was changed to put limits on our abilities to audit their overhead costs. When that change was made, a Consultant that I oversaw was in a nice small business office on the Silas Deane Highway. But with no more limits on overhead, they moved to one those spacious luxury office buildings just off the highway with much higher costs, and all we could do about it was pay the bill. And by the way, the American Council of Engineering Companies, ACEC, one of the most powerful lobbyist in DC, pushed through that change and many others that has made Transportation work much more expensive for the country.

But costs are not the only way that Consultants cost us more money. Their recommendations for projects always seem to favor the costliest options, because a full replacement as opposed to a rehab is more design work and that makes them more money. DOT has been considering bringing back tolls for a long time. Public opinion used to be if the money was used to repair and improve the roads and bridges, it had general support. That's why the State passed the Transportation Lock Box initiative, to give people confidence that toll money will be used on the roads. But then our consultant plan came out with a high number of electronic tolling stations along many of the state highways and routes. That density of toll stations is unlike anything that we see anywhere else in the northeast, and it was certainly different from how CT toll stations were set up in the past. This drastic plan hit like a shock wave and people started to question the tolls plan. The NO TOLLS group started to gain momentum and it leaves us where we are today, with legislatures nervous about supporting the tolls they know we need, for fear of voter backlash.

So why did DOT take such an unusual direction on tolls. Well I wasn't in the room, so I can't tell you for sure, but my engineering judgement and past experience tells me more electronic toll stations means more design work and more construction inspection, which means more money and profits for consultants. They did not stop to think how something so different would be accepted.

Speaking for myself, I do favor a toll plan, but one that uses a more reasonable number of tolling gantries, mostly focusing on the borders. We all use the roads so I think everyone should pay something, but the heavy loads of trucks puts more stress and does more damage to the roads and bridges, so they should pay more. State residents and commuters could be given discounts. I drove to Maryland and Maine last year, Connecticut was the only state I did not pay a toll. The Maryland trip was close to \$70 in tolls. How is it fair that everyone gets a free ride in Connecticut but we pay through the nose when we travel? Why has every other State judged it as a fair and reasonable transportation revenue system, but we do not.

The fact is we need a steady reliable source of income to keep our roads and bridges in a decent state of repair. As you travel Connecticut, you can see we have many projects improving our transportation system. But as a bridge inspector, I can tell you as quickly as an improvement project allows us to remove a bridge from a poor condition list, there is another one ready to take its place. Our New England winter weather and the road salts can promise us that the poor conditions will keep coming. So because the work consistently keeps coming at us, we need a funding system that is consistent as well. To fund a Transportation plan with Rainy Day money is just short sighted, what do you do next year? As vehicle fuel efficiencies continue to improve and more people turn to electric cars, the gas tax continues to become less effective. And the Feds haven't raised their gas tax since the 70's. That's why most other states realized it was necessary to use tolls to make up the difference. We need a reliable revenue source to address our Transportation needs.

If we combine Tolls with savings we can realize using less Consultants, we can make the Transportation budget less of a challenge every year. Another benefit is maybe we can do more thinking for ourselves, instead of following the Consultants lead, down the wrong road again.

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