

Testifying in Opposition to
Draft Bill LCO #373 An Act Concerning the Sustainability of Connecticut's
Transportation Infrastructure

Senator Leone, Representative Lemar, Senator Bergstein, Representative Simms, Senator Martin, Representative Devlin and members of the Transportation Committee:

The Lumber Dealers Association of Connecticut (LDAC) opposes Draft Bill LCO #373, which would establish an electronic toll collection system for large commercial trucks.

While we understand and support the need for increased funding to be directed towards transportation infrastructure needs, it should not come from taxes or tolls. The proposed toll plan is bad news for businesses across the State. It adds another financial burden to our industry and will further dampen the economic climate in Connecticut. The plan leaves the door wide open for future increases in toll rates and will, undoubtedly, be only the first step towards tolling all commercial vehicles and ultimately, all vehicles.

The bill calls for tolls on large commercial trucks in 12 different locations on six highways – I-84, I-91, I-95, I-395, I-684 and Route 8. To avoid these tolls, many business deliveries will simply abandon the highways in favor of local roads and bridges. This will reduce the projected revenue from the tolls, create unwanted traffic congestion in our neighborhoods and drive up the cost of all products shipped across the state.

The truck only toll plan will face serious legal challenges. In December, a federal appeals court backed the trucking industry in its legal fight to end Rhode Island's truck only tolls. The 1st U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals reversed a lower court ruling to dismiss the suit. The suit alleges the toll plan violates the U.S. Constitution's Commerce Clause by discriminating against out-of-state economic interests in favor of in-state interests. The ruling sends the case back to U.S. District Court. Connecticut taxpayers will be paying the legal bills for similar cases for years to come.

Moving forward, increased toll rates will be in the hands of a new state transportation council. Legislators will not have to vote up or down on increased rates or program expansion and taxpayers will be helpless to prevent their enactment.

Projected revenue from the tolls continues to be a moving target that seems to fluctuate daily. There are no detailed plans for which transportation projects will be funded with toll revenue and what protections do taxpayers have that these funds will not be raided for alternative spending plans in the future?

This plan is motivated by a desire to get the toll gantries built as soon as possible. Once up and operational, the state will never take the gantries down and will look to expand the toll plan as a steady revenue source for increased spending year after year. There is no language in the bill

that will definitively prevent additional toll locations in the future and there is no sunset clause for the program.

Connecticut is already overtaxed. The last thing we need is another drain on our economy. We urge you to oppose this legislation and protect businesses and taxpayers across the State.

Thank you.